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SUBJECT: ZIMBABWEAN MIGRATION TO MOZAMBIQUE: OPINIONS VARY

REF: STATE 109594

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) NGO and local government officials in Manica Province, which shares a border with Zimbabwe, estimate that up to 10,000 Zimbabweans are currently living in Manica Province, with new arrivals every day. In response to the uncertainty of the situation, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Mozambique has been monitoring the border and has recently updated its contingency plan should the situation in Zimbabwe continue to deteriorate. The British High Commission in Maputo is also closely watching Zimbabwe and has formulated its own plan for fleeing UK, Irish and Canadian citizens that may enter Mozambique. While the national government (GRM) has yet to implement a plan, it has lifted visa requirements for Zimbabweans, and believes that recent border activity is part of the normal movement of people within SADC. The Embassy continues to coordinate with civil and international actors and to press the GRM to consider contingency planning - even though a humanitarian crisis may not unfold in the short term.

AT THE BORDER: ZIMBABWEAN NUMBERS INCREASING

¶2. (SBU) Manica Town in Manica Province sits 18 km from the Zimbabwe border and is the first barometer for the situation of Zimbabweans crossing into Mozambique. In a recent visit by PolOff and PolSpecialist, the mayor of Manica said his city has grown by the thousands in the past few years due to the number of Zimbabweans settling in Manica. While initially most movement consisted of women coming to Manica and Chimoio to sell goods or buy commodities such as chicken, bread, and sugar, many visitors are now opting to stay as the situation in Zimbabwe has become more unstable. The mayor also noted that Zimbabweans continue to stay due to difficulties in distinguishing between Zimbabweans and Mozambicans (many in the region share a common tribal background) and a lack of interest in the issue by local law enforcement officials. International Office on Migration officials told PolOff that they estimate that there are anywhere from 3,000 to 10,000 Zimbabweans currently living in Manica Province, the majority being women. NGOs and local officials agree that cultural and linguistic affinities and a history of cross border movement are strong factors that would lead Zimbabweans to enter Mozambique in the event of a worsening situation.

UNHCR: NEW CONTINGENCY PLAN IN PLACE

¶3. (SBU) The resident UNHCR director briefed Poloff on 10/15 on the organization's border monitoring exercises for the past several years and indicated that the UNHCR recently updated its contingency

plan in the event of a meltdown in Zimbabwe. As Zimbabweans have begun entering South Africa in larger numbers, UNHCR has also made the decision to open an office in Chimoio with a staff dedicated to border monitoring to see if the same was happening at the Mozambican border. While UNHCR acknowledges a growing number of Zimbabweans entering Mozambique, they have had only one case of a Zimbabwean requesting refugee status so far. In most cases, UNHCR has observed Zimbabweans integrating relatively easily, particularly since many are educated and highly skilled entering a country that continues to lack qualified workers. While UNHCR estimates that up to 75,000 Zimbabweans could enter Mozambique should the economic situation in Zimbabwe collapse, they believe the situation will more likely follow the "Angolan model," whereby many Angolans temporarily settled and worked in South Africa (although not as refugees) and quickly returned once the situation stabilized.

THE BRITISH: MOZAMBIQUE A TRANSIT ROUTE

14. (SBU) In a meeting with Emboffs, the British Deputy High Commissioner noted that HMG has formulated a comprehensive plan to deal with a political/economic collapse in Zimbabwe. The High Commission has already logged all U.K. citizens and dependents, along with Canadians and Irish remaining in Zimbabwe, and has visited the Mozambique/Zimbabwe border on multiple occasions. While they plan to staff a "greeting center" near Manica should an influx of these citizens fleeing Zimbabwe enter Mozambique, they currently estimate that because of language issues, citizens likely would only use Mozambique as a transit country en route to Malawi or Zambia. The High Commission believes that the UNHCR estimate of 75,000 Zimbabweans potentially fleeing to Mozambique was a very conservative figure.

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GRM: NO VISAS NEEDED, NO REFUGEE PROBLEM

15. (SBU) On October 3, the governments of Zimbabwe and Mozambique agreed to lift visa requirements for citizens entering their respective countries as of November 1--Zimbabwe had been the last country sharing a border with Mozambique without a visa waiver agreement. While some NGO contacts have confided to Emboffs that they fear that the agreement could lead to a massive inflow of Zimbabweans, the GRM is dismissing these concerns. Indeed, even as the crisis in Zimbabwe has worsened, the public GRM stance has remained unchanged: cross border movement by Zimbabweans into Mozambique is part of the natural movement of people from one SADC country to another. As such, the GRM has not participated in any contingency planning with the UNHCR or other countries.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) The historical movement of people across the shared border in the past 30 years, spanning both the Zimbabwean independence war and the Mozambican civil war, coupled with cultural, linguistic, and familial affinities in the border region could help Zimbabweans to temporarily assimilate in Mozambique. Indeed, absent an influx of tens of thousands of Zimbabweans in a very short period of time, Mozambique may be able to absorb the new arrivals without creating a significant humanitarian problem in the near term. For now though, the GRM is treating the Zimbabwe situation as an internal matter, and the status of Zimbabweans in Mozambique remains largely under the radar. The effects of ending visa requirements between the two countries remains to be seen, but could make tracking Zimbabweans in Mozambique a more difficult task. Meanwhile, we continue to monitor the situation closely, coordinating with civil society and diplomatic contacts, while urging GRM counterparts to evaluate potential consequences of a worsening situation and to contemplate an appropriate response. END COMMENT

CHAPMAN